

MEMO

February 8, 2007

TO: Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee
FROM: Sally Hilander, Victim Information Specialist
RE: 2007 sex offender legislation

I serve as staff liaison for the Crime Victims Advisory Council, which is appointed by the department director. In addition, I answer a victim information phone line, provide referrals to victim advocacy programs, register victims for notification about offender custody status, and facilitate a "restorative justice" program that allows victims to meet with their offenders face to face.

Based on my communications with victims over the past six years, I can make a few general observations about how they view sex offender issues. Victims who serve on the council hear quarterly DOC staff presentations about incarceration, treatment and community corrections options. The members understand that almost all felony offenders eventually will be released. The council generally agreed that treatment combined with lengthy community supervision is important.

Most victims of sex crimes who call my office have not had the same opportunities as council members to become aware of incarceration, treatment and community corrections options. Most of them tell me they wish the offenders could remain in prison forever. Lengthy parole or probation supervision mitigates their fear somewhat. These callers are either the primary victims of incest, sexual assault and rape, or their children, spouses and other loved ones are the victims of these crimes.

Victims have a low tolerance for the notion of sex offenders residing in their communities but, again, their consternation is reduced when they hear the offenders are being closely supervised, preferably under GPS or other form of electronic monitoring. I believe these observations are true of the public in general.

Most victims of sex crimes seem to be concerned about sex offender tier levels. The council has heard reports in the past year from a sex offender treatment specialist, probation and parole staff and a former DOC director that tier levels, all of who reported that three-level system for designating sex offenders is subjective at best. There is an element of security in the tier designations, but the system is fairly flexible.

I hope this memo provides information that will help the subcommittee in its decision-making process.